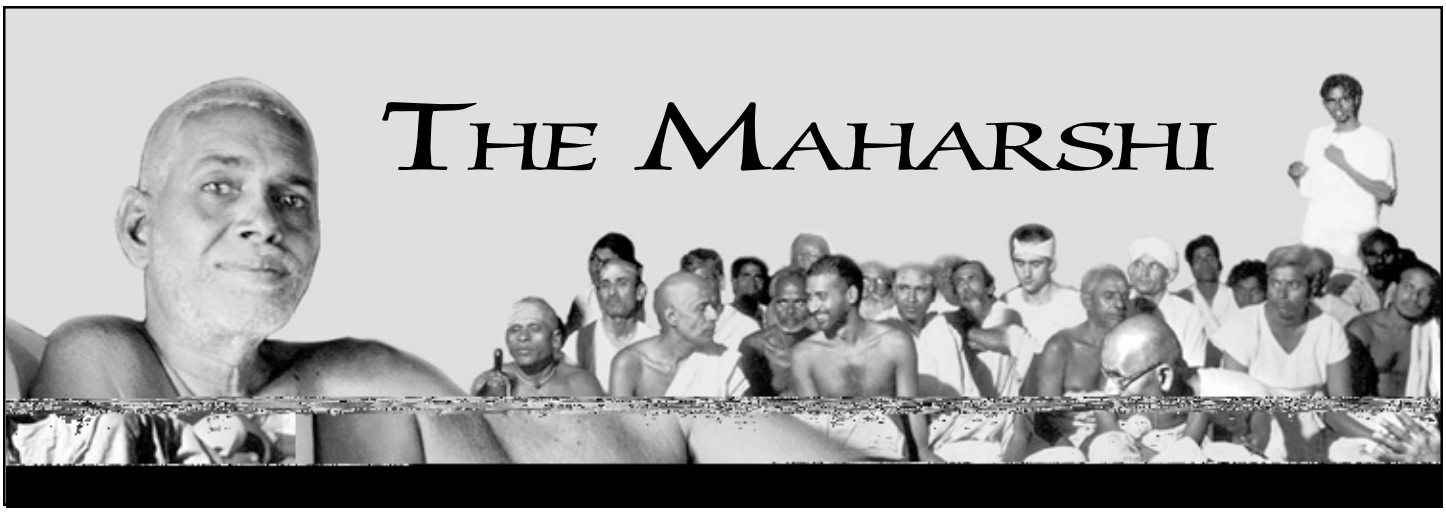

Jan/Feb 2004 **Vol. 14, No. 1**

RAMANA SAT-GURU

HE is now as he was. To many he said: "You are not the body." We see now that he was not the body. In his body's lifetime, as now, guidance came to all who turned to him, whether they could approach him physically or not; now, as in his body's lifetime, it radiates with peculiar force from his Ashram at the foot of Arunachala.

"People say I am leaving," he said just before the body's death. "Where could I go? I am here." Not "I shall be here" but "I am here". He is here in the eternal here and now; he is here in each one's heart; he is here also in his Ashram at Tiruvannamalai.

He inaugurated a new path independent of formal rites and initiation to suit the conditions of our age when true guidance is hard to find in any of the orthodox channels and when traditional forms of living do not fit into the pattern of life. It would have been a poor gift if it had been for his lifetime only. He is the Guru now as he was. Those many who never saw him in the body find his guidance no less powerful than we who did. Therefore it is not necessary for any successor to give initiation in his name. The initiation was silent and formless, as it still is; the guidance was straight to the heart, bypassing words and thought. Understanding is needed, and courage and devotion; the path is there and the Guide to lead and support you to the Goal.

How can he perform the act of guiding aspirants if he has become one with Universal Being, theorists ask. He has not. He already was one with Universal Being. Every one is; it is only a question of realizing it, and he had realized the Oneness before death already. He himself confirmed that there is no difference between Realization before death and after.

The Self is what you are, whether Muslim or Christian no less than Hindu. Therefore he turns people inwards to the Self, to the quest of the Self, making no distinction among religions.

Books and scriptures teach that the quest must be undertaken and the ego dissolved. Once this has been understood, why study them interminably? Therefore he did not speak often or unprompted on theory. Did Christ or Buddha? About practice he spoke gladly.

Powers are useless, often an impediment. Any desire, even for powers that are considered higher, indicates that there is still someone who desires. It is that someone who is to be traced out and dissolved.

Only for our sake the Guru appears outwardly; he is the Self in the heart. But because the impure mind misinterprets messages, the instructions are received outwardly to be followed inwardly.

What is Ramana? When he joined in singing 'Ramana Sad-Guru' he pointed to his body and said "Do you think this is Ramana?"

"In the recesses of the lotus-shaped heart of all, from Vishnu downwards, there shines the Absolute Consciousness, which is the same as Arunachala or Ramana. When the mind melts with love of Him and reaches the inmost recess of the Heart where He dwells as the Beloved, the subtle eye of pure intellect opens and He reveals Himself as Pure Consciousness."[1]

1. from *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*

But how, it may be asked, is one to know that one has been taken up by Ramana Maharshi and become his disciple now that he is no longer here in the body to confirm it? The same problem existed in his lifetime also. He very seldom confirmed in words having given initiation. It was to be understood. And then also there were some who failed to understand. As I explained in my last editorial, the time for rigid formalism, whether of initiation or of the path into which one is initiated, is past. The new trend required to meet the conditions of our times, did not, as I pointed out there, begin with the Maharshi. He brought it to completion, but it started as far back as the 19th Century. Sai Baba, who lived at the turn of the century, also gave no formal initiation. Sri Lahiri Mahasaya, who died in 1895, so simplified *Kriya Yoga* as to make it accessible to householders also, and even to non--Hindus. In the Maharshi's lifetime, as now, his initiation came without ritual, whether through a potent, intense look or in a dream or some other way. Now, as then, people just know that the Maharshi is their Guru, that he has taken them up and that Grace flows to them from him.

And what then? People who turn to the path require some method, some discipline, some technique. It has been sufficiently explained in *The Mountain Path* that not all the Maharshi's disciples, even in his lifetime, followed the path of Self-enquiry. In particular, readers who wish for confirmation of this are referred to 'The Maharshi and the Path of Devotion' by A. Devaraja Mudaliar in our issue of October 1964 and 'A Chakra at Sri Ramanasramam' by Krishna Bhikshu in that of April 1965. His Grace supports his devotees on whatever path they follow, whether there be in it more of devotion or knowledge or action, whether fortified by ritual or not, whether within the framework of any religion or not. And if any change becomes advisable, if any forms or techniques or methods are outgrown and cease to be helpful, some indication will come. Guidance will not fail.

Having said this, however, the opposite side of the medal also should be shown. That is, that the method which Bhagavan always recommended in the first place, which he spoke of as the most simple and direct and put first in all his teaching was Self-enquiry. It follows, therefore, that such of his devotees as can practise it should.

Some people have got a false idea that Self-enquiry is a coldly intellectual method. There is no such thing. Intellectual understanding may be helpful up to a point on one's quest, but it cannot be the quest. 'I am not this body; I am not the thoughts' may be a useful preliminary to the enquiry but it cannot be the enquiry. The enquiry is not a mental investigation such as a psychologist might indulge in. It is not a probing into the faculties, urges, memories or tendencies of one's conscious or subconscious mind, but a quest of the pure I-amness that lies behind all these.

It consists of turning the mind inwards to the sense of being, the feeling of 'I-am'. Therefore it is not verbal. 'Who am I?' is not a *mantra*. Its repetition might perhaps help to steady the mind in the early stages but can be of little use really. One hint that Bhagavan gave was that consciousness should not be centered in the head but in the spiritual heart at the right side of the chest, because it is not a question of thinking but of feeling and being. That does not mean thinking about the spiritual heart or meditating on it. When you want to see you don't think about your eyes, you just use them; so also with the heart. It is not necessary to locate it exactly any more than it is to locate your eyes in a mirror before you can see with them. What is wanted is to have the experience, not to argue about it. This about the heart is only a hint, but a very useful one.

A man is made up of acting, thinking and being. Being underlies the other two because you can't act or think unless you first are; but it is usually so covered over by them that it is not perceived. It can be compared to a cinema screen and they to the pictures projected on it. It is the screen that supports the pictures and yet it is so covered over by them that it is not perceived. Only very rarely, for a flash, one is aware of just being and feels it as pure, spontaneous, causeless happiness. It is also pure, thought-free consciousness. The purpose of enquiry is to make one aware of being at will, and for longer and longer periods.

This means that although the term 'meditation' is conventionally used for Self-enquiry, it is not meditation as the dictionary defines it. Meditation requires an object, something to meditate on, whereas in enquiry there is only the subject. You are not looking for anything new, anything outside yourself, but simply concentrating on being, on your self, on the pure 'I am' of you. It is not thinking but suspending thoughts while retaining consciousness.

Normally when you stop thinking you go to sleep; and when one first begins enquiry the mind often does try to do so. An attack of overwhelming sleepiness comes

over you; but as soon as you stop the enquiry and turn to some other occupation of the mind it passes, thereby showing that it was not real tiredness but just an instinctive resistance to thought-free consciousness. One simply has to fight it.

Thoughts themselves are a far more persistent obstruction. They rush into the mind in an unending stream. You drive them out and others slip in from behind. You think you are free from these and before you notice you are indulging others. The only way is persistence. Constant alertness. Not to get carried away by thoughts. To see them aloofly like clouds passing over a clear sky and ask: 'What is this thought? Who did it come to? To me, but who am I?' And so you bring your mind back to enquiry. The mind is likened to a monkey rushing from tree to tree, ever restless, never content to be still. It has to be checked from its restlessness and held firmly to enquiry.

But it is not only the wandering nature of the mind and the unending succession of thoughts that is the obstruction; it is also the ego-drive behind many of the thoughts. This gives them power and makes them far harder to dispel. You may convince yourself doctrinally that there is no ego and have occasional brief glimpses of the being-consciousness which is unruffled happiness when the ego is in fact absent; but you are drawn to this girl or want to impress this friend or dominate this group; you resent this criticism or feel slighted by this person; you feel insecure in your job, cling to your possessions, hanker after money or power: and all of these are affirmations of the ego which you believe not to exist. So long as they exist, it does. If there is no ego who can feel anger or desire, resentment or frustration?

This means that enquiry is not merely a cold investigation but a battle. Every path is, in every religion. The ego, or apparent ego, has to be destroyed. That is the one essential common to all of them. The only difference is how to do it. There are paths which set you attacking the various vices individually – lust, arrogance and so on, and cultivating the opposing virtues; but Self-enquiry is more direct. Such methods are like lopping the branches off a tree: so long as the roots and trunk remain, fresh ones will grow. Self-enquiry aims at uprooting the tree itself. If the ego is deprived of one outlet – say if it is forced to celibacy – others will develop – say gluttony or vanity. But if the ego itself is dissolved the vices in which it found expression will collapse like deflated balloons. But it is constant warfare until the ego really is dissolved.

This is what Self-enquiry is aiming at. It does not teach one any more theory or doctrine. It is quite possible to know all the doctrine that is necessary before you start– "Simply that being is and you are That". What it does, after a certain amount of practice, is to bring increasingly frequent and lengthy experience of pure timeless being which is also pure awareness and unruffled happiness. This is not mental, and yet the mind is aware of it. It is not physical, and yet it is felt physically as a vibration or a waveless calm. Once awakened it begins to appear spontaneously even when you are not 'meditating', or to subsist as an undercurrent to whatever you are doing, to the routine of life, while you are talking, even while thinking.

This is important with regard to method. It explains why Bhagavan preferred his devotees to follow the quest in the life of the world. Sitting daily in 'meditation' is useful, in most cases, indispensable; but it is not enough. So far as possible fixed times should be set aside for it, since the mind accustoms itself to them, just as it does with physical functions like eating and sleeping, and responds more readily. For people who are bound by professional and domestic obligations, just after waking in the morning and before going to sleep at night are excellent times. But apart from that Bhagavan would tell people to practise enquiry always, to ask themselves 'Who is doing this?' to engage in activity without the 'I-am-the-doer' illusion. Keeping up this attitude of mind throughout the day's activities is equivalent to remaining alert, to welcoming the sense of being whenever it comes. Constant alertness and remembering is necessary when not 'meditating' no less than concentration when remembering. At first there will be frequent forgetting: that also has to be combated. The 'current of awareness' has to be cultivated and fostered. It is very seldom that there is achievement without effort.

This is the path that Bhagavan laid down. It is independent both of forms and doctrines. It requires no ritual. It can be followed invisibly by the housewife or shopkeeper no less than the monk or yogi. The Grace of Bhagavan is available to all who turn to him, but it is those who strive on this path that utilize it the most fully and the most wisely. It is an unfailing support and an inexhaustible treasure for them.

–Editorial by Arthur Osborne in the January, 1966 Mountain Path

GREETINGS FROM CHILE

***Patricia Zárraga**, a devotee from Santiago, Chile, spent last year in New York City. Several times a week she would travel by subway from Manhattan to Queens and visit the New York Arunachala Ashrama. Patricia easily settled into the flow of Ashrama life, working on Spanish translations of books and videos, enthusiastically attending the Veda Parayanas and meditations and befriending devotees and guests with her cheerfulness and natural devotion.*

After returning to Chile in September she sent us this poetic narration of her observations. The letter is an intimate glimpse into the New York Ashrama life, which also reflects the clarity and sincerity of the writer. Ellen Barrett and Evelyn Saphier translated it from Spanish.

SANTIAGO is warm these days; the spring has distinguished itself by filling the all-pervasive cement of the city with colorful flowers.

REMEMBERING…

I'm always remembering you all:

Dennis with his tranquility, responding with a smile, feeding his flying sadhus, cooking his luxurious cauliflowers on the day he fixes lunch, and above all, nourishing all of those present who with their questions seek something more than words, that is to say those of us who are seeking silence alone. That silence was the best nourishment I found there in the Ashrama, set in the midst of the New York of innumerable sirens and a thousand disturbances. I'll not forget his evening Pradakshina of the Hill of Arunachala of Queens [Dennis walks in the evenings]. Whether in New York or traveling abroad, he is always there, writing the story of the only journey, that of the heart.

I also remember Evelyn, meditating and accompanying with her voice the morning songs; also tea at dawn, reading the words that bind to our minds that intangible essence which Bhagavan gives to us as a gift. I remember as well her moving from one activity to another, whether correcting her students' work, meditation, school, home, car, and I can't leave out her boiling yoga classes. Your conversation, your quest, your meeting...

I remember Paul following his interior high road while caressing a cat or sharing in the Friday puja, skimming the newspaper, or immersed in his pallet of harmonious and cosmic colors;

Nong, arriving with steps shaken from the subway, taking from his knapsack some new outline for a CD; his great desire to get just the right answer from Dennis; his natural transparency that can't hide anything – even his dream of meeting the perfect woman that morphs immediately into its opposite, his other dream of being a solitary sadhu, abiding in the totality of his Inner Being….

Also present before me is Geeta's daily arrival with her orderliness and silence, showing herself a little close and a little distant, but always there, inside her Self; her cataloguing work and her frugality; her discriminating analysis of texts, her knowledge of Indian languages juxtaposed to her Occidental outlook;

Arthur, immersed in his computers, going over infinite numbers of intangible systems on the net, trying to put quantum chaos in order. The same human being who, by some very personal law of physics, bounds up the stairs two at a time to receive those who've just arrived. I remember him always scrupulously cleaning the hidden edges of the kitchen that nobody ever sees. Or driving his car with four pairs of glasses that appear from and disappear into different pockets of his jacket while Krishna Das pours from the windows;

Komal, arriving with his suitcase very organized to spend several days each month; his cans of spinach and his powerful singing voice; his lively recollections of the time when he knew Ramana, his hands moving to the rhythm of his heart, as his eyes are made moist by Arunachala.

The trips to Washington that we made together…

Mamtha and Prakash: their warm and loving reception every time we arrived as a group at their house; organizing meals and beds; smiling… decorating the temple… their children singing and playing… Every meeting was simultaneously a satsang and a warm family welcome in their forest-surrounded home;

Nitya and Anand in that profound ceremony when their daughter turned one; their son running around by the patio and his grandmother receiving him with a big smile. The ceremony was an unforgettable entry of a little girl

into the embrace of the One; a beautiful family that always opens its heart.

I recall as well the President with his big smile, looking upon each one of his grandchildren and at his wife caring attentively for the little one in her arms, both sharing in devotions with the devotees during their trip.

How well I remember the last trip we took together when the smile of sweet Natasha awakening to a different life after her father remained forever at Arunachala was engraved on my heart.

I remember those who frequently attended the pujas: Vaidyanathan and Raksha, present every Friday, offering their songs and their rich dishes; great conversations at the satsang; always attentive about taking me to the subway in their car; Hena, with her big-eyed gaze, surrounded by her large family, the littlest of her daughters curled up asleep in her skirts; Ramesh, moving, singing, helping to serve, attending to everything, and Sivakami, his mother, always present at each ceremony; Savithri and Mohan with their profound conversations and rich dishes, while Radha, their daughter, grows up and adapts to North American life; Margo, coming and going with her mysterious smile or scanning an image into the computer; Peter, straight-backed, reciting Vedic chants to the rhythm of the breeze and stone of Arunachala; Chris, arriving Tuesday night as if he'd come back from a trip all the way around the world or, on another day at the temple, with teary eyes talking about his first trip to Arunachala, as he holds his son in his arms; smiling Guruprasad, studying for his exam or cutting his birthday cake; Dinesh, the friend who before leaving for India in August, told us how he had found his beloved; Dick, arriving from Chicago after a long farewell to Olivia at Arunachala; Janet, arriving from Florida with her intense gaze; Darlene from Canada, whom I never met personally, but ever present; and all the others whose names I don't remember, only their dear words, their presence.

From this distance, in the shadow of the noble peaks of the Andes, I would like to thank each one of you for having been able to enjoy your company during the year I spent in New York. It was a beautiful and profound experience of great transcendence in my life.

Thank you for the words.
Thank you for the silence.
In Bhagavan,
Patricia Zárraga
Santiago de Chile
21st October, 2003

FORTY VERSES IN PRAISE OF SRI RAMANA

by Kavyakanta Ganapati Muni

(translated by Dr. Anil K. Sharma and continued from the Nov/Dec 2003 issue)

timirāṇi na kevalaṁ vacobhiḥ
karuṇāpāṅgavilokitaiś ca nṛṇām|
hṛdaye prasaranti mardayantaṁ
bhagavantaṁ ramaṇaṁ guruṁ namāmi||33||

timirāṇi - darkness, *na* - not, *kevalaṁ* - only, *vacobhiḥ* - by words, *karuṇā* - grace, compassion, *apāṅga* - from the corner of the eye, *vilokitaiś* - by glances, *ca* - and, *nṛṇām* - of men, *hṛdaye* - in the heart, *prasaranti* - prevails, *mardayantaṁ* - destroying, *bhagavantaṁ* - Bhagavan, *ramaṇaṁ* - Ramana, *guruṁ* - to Guru, *namāmi* - I bow

I bow to the guru Bhagavan Ramana, who destroys the darkness prevailing in the hearts of men, not only by his words, but by his sidelong glances of grace and compassion.

bhavajalanidhiṁ gāhaṁ gāhaṁ cirādalasālasān
padajalaruhadvandva-dvīpaṁ śritāṁstava samprati|
ramaṇabhagavan kalyā-ṇānāṁ niketana pāhi
naḥ sadaya dayayā siktair bhaktān apāṅga-vilokitaiḥ||34||

bhava - world, *jalanidhiṁ* - ocean, *gāhaṁ gāhaṁ* - diving into again and again, *cirād* - a long time, *alasālasān* - extremely tired, *pada* - foot, *jalaruha* - lotus, *dvandva* - two, pair, *dvīpaṁ* - island, *śritāṁs* - approached for refuge, *tava* - your, *samprati* - now, at this moment, *ramaṇabhagavan* -

Oh Bhagavan Ramana, *kalyāṇānāṁ* - of virtues, *niketana* - abode, *pāhi* - protect, *naḥ* - us, *sadaya* - merciful, *dayayā* - with grace, *siktair* - with pouring out, *bhaktān* - to the devotees, *apāṅga* - from the corner of the eye, *vilokitaiḥ* - by glances

Oh Bhagavan Ramana, diving again and again into the ocean of the world, we are extremely tired. Now, at this moment, we approach the island of your lotus feet for refuge. You, the merciful abode of virtues, please protect us with the grace that pours out through your eyes to your devotees .

yadi na jananī stanyaṁ dadyāc chiśor bata kā gatiḥ
yadi paśupathiḥ krodhaṁ kuryāt paśor avanaṁ kutaḥ।
yadi padajuṣām ācārya tvaṁ nihaṁsi na saṁśayaṁ bhramaśataparābhūta ete tarantu bhavaṁ kathaṁ ।।35।।

yadi - if, *na* - not, *jananī* - mother, *stanyaṁ* -milk, *dadyāc* - would give, *chiśor* - of the child, *bata* - oh!, alas, *kā* - what, *gatiḥ* -the fate, *yadi* - if, *paśupathiḥ* - cowherd, or Lord of creatures, *krodhaṁ* - anger, *kuryāt* - would be, (would make), *paśor* - of the cow, *avanaṁ* - preservation, protection, *kutaḥ* - where, *yadi* - if, *pada* - feet, *juṣām* - resorting to, taking delight in, *ācārya* - Teacher, *tvaṁ* - you, *nihaṁsi* - dispel, *na* - not, *saṁśayaṁ* - doubt, *bhrama* - confusion, *śata* - hundred, multiple, *parābhūtā* - overcome, *ete* - these, *tarantu* - may cross over, *bhavaṁ* - wordly existence, *kathaṁ* - how?

If the mother will not give milk, alas, what will be the fate of the child? If the cowherd be angry, how will the cows be protected?

If you, Teacher, do not dispel the doubts of those resorting to your feet, how will those overcome by many confusions cross over this worldy existence?

(to be continued)

In the years when I used to sleep on the floor of the hall, beside Bhagavan, I woke up one night to see him reclining on his couch. Seeing that I was awake, he said: "In my early years at Tiruvannamalai I sometimes opened my eyes and found that it was dark, and sometimes it was light. That was all that I knew of the passing of day and night." *–V. Venkataraman*

Letters and Comments

The Maharshi and the Impersonal Self

I have one question after reading this newsletter [Nov/Dec 2003 issue], and that is, what exactly does it mean to say that the Maharshi still exists as the Self. The Maharshi is there spoken of as if he had a specific identity to whom one could relate. The problem becomes obvious when one considers that if he has indeed merged with the Absolute, he could not be distinguishable from it as Maharshi. I don't object to saying that he has merged with the Ocean of Being, or the Absolute; the confusion is that, having done so, he would no longer be Maharshi any more than any other who has thus merged. To speak of Maharshi, as opposed to Buddha, or Franklin Merrell-Wolff, etc., would be contradictory. So, does the Maharshi exist separate from the Self, or is he identified (if one can say this) as the Absolute, indistinguishable from it? To say that he still exists without a body, as if he were different from the Self, makes little sense. I don't see how one can have it both ways. Can you have your Maharshi and the impersonal Self? Is the Self somehow aware as Maharshi...? What do you think?

Steven, USA

Did the Maharshi extend his guidance and grace to seekers while he was embodied? If you put this question to those who earnestly sought his company and guidance, undoubtedly the answer would be a resounding "Yes". Many felt his influence from both far and near during the years he resided at Arunachala. If that was so then, what obstructs the same guidance and grace now? The disappearance of a physical body, you say.

For those with a limited vision of Reality the Maharshi 'appeared' to occupy a body and responded to seekers who sought his grace and guidance. This was perceived by the seekers and existed in accordance with the Divine scheme for the ultimate liberation of souls.

We must remember that the Maharshi existed as the 'Self' alone. With our limitations we perceived him to be embodied. He was not a body or a personality. We identify our self with our limited body and mind. He did not. "Maharshi: The error lies in the identification of the Self with the body. If Bhagavan is the

body you may ask that body. But understand him whom you address as Bhagavan. He is not the body. He is the Self."

The Maharshi was totally merged in the Absolute even before he arrived at Tiruvannamalai in 1896. There was no question of a body or personality for him then, even as there is no question of a body or personality for him now.

For their own edification, seekers sought his company while he appeared in time and space and occupied a body. This was their perception only, from their limited level of understanding. As I already said, he was not a body then nor is he now. His parting words on the matter are telling: "People say I am going away. Go! Where can I go? I am here."

Therefore the question of the Maharshi merging in the Absolute at the time of death cannot be posed. He was and 'is' the Absolute now and always.

The Maharshi was very reserved in expressing any outward signs of influence upon the spiritual state of those who came to him. Nevertheless he did so, and in dramatic ways; sheltered from public gaze, he acted within the consciousness of those seekers who approached him physically, or just mentally from a distance.

Since his Mahasamadhi, I have heard untold number of testimonies from those who have experienced his presence and grace in dreams or in the waking state, or stories of rapturous encounters by simply looking at his photo. I have also seen and heard of marvelous occurrences of intervention which go far beyond the barriers of coincidence or rational thinking. But normally, for most devotees, his influence remains unobtrusive though potent, just as when he walked amongst us.

So, if the Maharshi responded to those who invoked his grace in the past while he appeared to occupy a body, what is it that obstructs this same response now that there is no body?

We, as seekers and devotees, should sincerely inquire within and answer this question. Metaphysical explanations can perhaps satisfy the intellect, but not our burning need for a permanent peace, a resting place wherein mortality has lost its hold and the Eternal Being of Awareness remains unbroken.

In 2003, can Sri Ramana Maharshi help you in this quest for freedom? Only you can answer that.

–Editor

Camelback Mountain

I am pleasantly surprised by your interest in the Camelback write-up [see Nov/Dec 2003 issue]. I had no idea that it might end up in the newsletter.

Camelback is Bhagavan's gift of grace to me. Although I have lived here for nearly seven years without the benefit of the company of other devotees, I have persisted in my devotion to the path of Bhagavan through his grace. I hope that this article will help to inspire other devotees.

I just now signed up for e-mail subscription to the Maharshi Newsletter. This way you won't have to make any special effort to send the Nov/Dec issue to me and I will get the new ones automatically when they come out.

Yours in Bhagavan,
Michael Bowes, Phoenix, AZ

Ramana Satsangs

Satsangs with recitations, songs, readings and meditation have been going on in a few places near or in large cities in the USA and Canada. Some of them are weekly. If you would like to attend any of these, please go to the Arunachala Ashrama Events web page, http://www.arunachala.org/Ashrama/Events, for more information.